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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: NINEWA: BOMBINGS ROCK YEZIDI COMMUNITY; ONLY
EFFECTIVE SECURITY IS WITH THE KURDS

REF: A. 06 BAGHDAD 4584

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 570

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader Jason Hyland: 1.4 (B) and (D)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. According to the best local estimates, four near-simultaneous VBIEDs August 14 killed at least 200, wounded at least 300 and destroyed dozens of structures in the Yezidi villages of Qahtaniya and Al Jazeera in the northern Iraqi province of Ninewa. 4/1 Brigade Combat Team Commander COL Twitty and PRT TL Hyland visited the attack site August 15, together with the Ninewa Governor and Police Chief to express condolences and offer assistance to the local population. The Governor's visit in particular was well received by the local population. This huge attack on the minority Yezidi community in a rural district west of Mosul illustrates the terrorists' efforts to target remote less-protected areas, as security improves elsewhere. As well, it is likely an attempt by AQI to incite tension along a key fault line in the territories under dispute in the Article 140 process. The temporal leader of all Yezidis said members of his community risk their lives whenever they travel outside of solely Kurdish-controlled Yezidi regions of Ninewa province. In a radical change of rhetoric since even two months ago, one Yezidi leader told us that they now identify themselves with Kurds ethnically and politically, but they continued to stress their religious differences with the Muslim Kurds. End Summary.

Catastrophic Bombings in Western Ninewa

[1](#)2. (S) Two VBIEDs exploded in succession in the western Ninewa town of Qahtaniya, about 75 miles west of Mosul, at approximately 1930 August 14. At approximately the same time, two separate VBIEDs detonated in the nearby village of Al Jazeera. Reports indicate that terrorists used tractor trailers and dump trucks to deliver some of the explosives. Local Iraqi officials' estimates of casualties varied widely, but center on at least 200 killed and 300 wounded in the attacks, though that number may rise. Many of Qahtaniya's crude, one-story structures were leveled in the explosions, trapping victims. Qahtaniya, a town of 15,000, and Al Jazeera, a town of 9,000, are poor, agricultural, almost exclusively Yezidi towns in the Sinjar district. They are on the margins of effective Kurdish control in western Ninewa province and abut Sunni Arab tribal areas.

[1](#)3. (C) Coalition Forces arrived at the scene soon after the attacks and provided assistance to the community, helping to evacuate some of the injured. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has opened the roadblocks into Kurdistan so that those wounded in this attack can be treated in hospitals in the neighboring provinces of Dahuk and Erbil. As well, the Coalition is accepting casualties at the Forward Operating Base Marez hospital outside Mosul.

14. (C) 4/1 Brigade Combat Team Commander COL Twitty led an August 15 site visit, which included PRT Leader Hyland, Ninewa Governor Kashmoula, Ninewa Police Chief General Wathiq, other senior local officials and international press.

Khataniya is a poor village of simple mud-brick houses and the attacks flattened the structures; local residents expressed anger at the terrorists and fear for their lives, but clearly welcomed the visit by both Iraqi and American representatives. The mayor of Tal Afar joined the group at the site of the attacks. The officials expressed their commitment to assist residents affected by the attacks. In an interview with a local television station, Governor Kashmoula pledged to help and called for increased GOI resources. The Governor asked local officials to draw up a list of their most-pressing needs, and to provide an accurate list of all those who died or who were injured so they could petition for compensation from the GOI. Local officials appeared still stunned by the event, and trying to ascertain the facts on the ground. General Wathiq said in a separate television interview that the attack showed that terrorists are having trouble finding hard targets that they can successfully attack and are instead attacking more vulnerable targets.

15. (C) TL Hyland August 15 called hereditary temporal leader of the Yezidis Emir Tahsin Beg to express his condolences on the part of the USG and to offer assistance to the victims. Tahsin Beg said he expects further attacks on Yezidis, both in the Sinjar and Shikhan districts.

Yezidis Face Death Threats

16. (C) Earlier on August 14, TL Hyland, 4/1 Deputy Commanding Officer LTC Boden, BCT Chaplain MAJ Butterworth and PRT IPAOs

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Hankey and Polacheck met in Shikhan with the temporal and spiritual leaders of the Yezidi, the minority, non-Muslim, Kurdish-speaking religious community based in Ninewa, northern Iraq. Emir Tahsin Beg said his community fears radical Islamist attacks when traveling outside the Yezidi-majority areas under the protection of Kurdish security forces. The de facto Kurdish control of this community, about 25 miles southeast of Dahuk, has fostered a permissive and safe, though tense, security environment. The Kurdish presence is seen in the Peshmerga presence on the ground, a large Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) headquarters and Kurdish flags prominently flying. However, outside of those towns under Kurdish protection, Tahsin Beg said, "Yezidis are killed for being Yezidi." Security concerns have forced the cancellation of the Yezidis' annual pilgrimage from around the world to the holy town of Lalish) in Shikhan) since 2004. Similarly, the pilgrimage to Sinjar Mountain has been poorly attended in the same time frame. Baba Sheikh, the spiritual leader of Yezidis, echoed these same concerns about security to TL Hyland.

Yezidis Turn to Kurds for Security, Politics

17. (C) Tahsin Beg said Ninewa Governor Kashmoula (Kurdish Alliance) "doesn't do anything" to help protect the Yezidi community, though Vice Governor Khasro Goran (KDP) visits regularly. Conversely, Tahsin Beg told TL Hyland the Peshmerga pays for a Yezidi security force within the towns and provides a security umbrella for the Yezidi areas. Tahsin Beg praised KRG Prime Minister Barzani and Iraqi President Talibani for their support and protection of his community. Cameran Kheira Beg, a former national-level Iraqi politician and nephew of Tahsin Beg, argued that security in Yezidi areas could be improved by creating official police positions for Yezidis in their hometowns, tightly controlling the distribution of weapons to officers across the province and improving police salaries relative to potential terrorist financial offers. Tahsin Beg said the changing ethnic makeup of the Shikhan district affects security, citing a recent influx of Sunni Arabs into the area, which had historically

been entirely Yezidi. He also made an impassioned appeal for Coalition Forces remaining in Iraq.

18. (C) Tashin Beg told TL Hyland that the Yezidis are definitely Kurds, but are differentiated from the vast majority of Kurds because they are not Muslim. This contradicts statements he made as late as June to former-TL Knight. Cameran Beg said the feeling is reciprocated, with the Kurds considering Shikhan as part of Kurdish Dahuk province. The political leaders went out of their way to stress this message, with Cameran Beg welcoming PRT members as "guests of the Yezidi Kurds." Despite this newfound identification as Kurds, Tahsin Beg said an undercurrent of religious tension with Kurds remains because Yezidis are not Muslims.

Yezidis Want Article 140 Now, Support Joining Kurds

19. (C) Yezidi as well as KDP leaders in Shikhan all say they want the Article 140 referendum. Tahsin Beg said "everyone" in the district wants the vote "as soon as possible" and that most would vote to join Kurdistan. The KDP district chief said the people of Shikhan want the Article 140 referendum but the GOI is stalling. Nonetheless, "it must go ahead," he said.

Comment

10. (C) Comment: This sort of attack on a poorly protected rural area shows increased desperation by terrorists to disrupt political stability; the possibility of further spectacular attacks in Ninewa concerns many. The August 14 attacks will likely push the Yezidi community even closer to the Kurds, who now seem to be their only effective protection. Tahsin Beg's departure from his earlier comments regarding the Yezidis' ethnic identification with the Kurds could be either a sign of a developing political alliance or simply his resignation to Kurdish power. We will follow up directly with him, when PRT Leader meets him in the coming days. Regardless of motivation, a Yezidi association with the Kurds would directly affect how the Sinjar district, on the border between Kurds and Sunni Arabs, votes in the Article 140 referendum on the area's future status. Both the Kurds and the Sunni Arabs possibly stand to gain from the attacks, with the Kurds potentially cementing the Yezidis' support before the referendum and the Sunni Arabs possibly intimidating the Yezidis to leave before the vote even happens. PRT Ninewa will continue to work closely with its military partners and provincial officials to help the affected communities recover. End Comment.

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